DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 200 CS 210 417

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TITLE Trends and Issues in English Instruction, 1987--Seven Summaries. Summaries of Informal Annual Discussions of the Commissions of the National Council of Teachers of English and the NCTE Standing Committee against Censorship.
INSTITUTION National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Ill.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 22p.; For the 1984-1986 Trends and Issues Reports, see ED 240 606, ED 252 881, and ED 267 413, respectively.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Censorship; *Curriculum Development; Educational Media; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Instruction; Higher Education; Language Standardization; Language Usage; *Literature Appreciation; *Reading Instruction; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Educational Issues

ABSTRACT

Information on current trends and issues in English instruction, compiled by directors of the following National Council of Teachers of English groups, is presented in this report: Commission on Composition (Charles I. Schuster); Commission on Curriculum (Eileen Lundy); Commission on the English Language (James C. Stalker); Commission on Media (David England); Commission on Reading (Dorothy J. Watson); Commission on Literature (Gladys Veidemanis); and Standing Committee against Censorship (John M. Kean). Some of the topics discussed include journal writing, test development and administration, teacher evaluation, class size, computer uses in education, language variation, bilingual education, phonics, state adoption of textbooks, preservice preparation programs for elementary language arts teachers, mass media in the English curriculum, basal readers, teacher empowerment, censorship, and the separation of teachers of literature from teachers of writing. (SRT)

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Trends and Issues in English Instruction, 1987--Seven Summaries

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Summaries of Informal Annual Discussions of the Commissions of the National Council of Teachers of English and the NCTE Standing Committee against Censorship

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Commission on Composition
Charles I. Schuster, Director

As part of its agenda at the November, 1986 Convention, the Commission on Composition discussed trends and issues in the teaching of writing. Here is a summary of that discussion. This summary is, perhaps, a bit long--but then our discussion was serious and extended.

Commission members registered their strong concern over the growing national attack on journal writing in the schools. Under the guise of students' (and parents') rights to privacy, conservative individuals and interest groups are mounting campaigns to prevent school children from writing personal and expressive discourse in journals, daybooks, dialectic notebooks, etc. In the Commission's view, such a prohibition would undercut one of the most fundamental methods through which students learn to write and think. In response to this threat, the Commission is writing a SLATE Starter Sheet which will establish guidelines for using the journal within an academic setting. If deemed appropriate, the Starter Sheet might ultimately become a Position Statement.

As in previous years, Commission members discussed the issue of testing writing. Clearly such testing is on the upswing, locally, regionally, and nationally. Since such wholesale testing is a fait accompli, we wondered how best to insure that these tests are good and effective ones. We felt it essential that concerned professionals involved in writing instruction involve themselves in test development and test administration. We raised several questions about large-scale school and state assessments including: who evaluates these state-wide tests? Do these tests actually include reliable and predictive writing samples? Who establishes the evaluative criteria by which these tests are scored? Who determines the various cut-off scores? Who decides how the test results are used? We were concerned that in at least one state, teachers do not know who the readers of such tests are. We were generally concerned that the power and influence of testing writing greatly exceeds our current capability actually to test writing in a reasonable and responsible fashion. And members expressed concern about the public perception of exam results; many people may not know that scores must be distributed so as to ensure both low and high scores, the low and high scores are inevitable no matter how much better the population performs as a whole.

We were also concerned about local and national examinations which offer students college credit for writing (or English) courses taken in high school. Very often, a literature course in high school gets translated as a one- or two-semester college credit in

composition, an anomaly about which few people are concerned. We understand the incentives for such a procedure but wondered--especially in a time when writing ability among all students is still extremely weak--whether such exams serve students well. Such procedures perpetuate the mistaken notion that learning to write is a finite and measurable skill like learning to sand a plank of wood. On the contrary, learning to write is a developmental ability that grows along with the student.

In this same realm of testing, Commission members expressed some concern about tests which evaluate teachers. We can understand the motivating force behind such tests, and all of us want teachers to be demonstrably able in their subject areas. Our concern was that these tests--if they are to be implemented--be designed carefully, that tests for writing teachers include a component that actually requires teachers to write, and that NCTE and other professional teacher organizations and individuals be involved in the design and implementation of such tests.

On the national level, we were pleased that the literacy movement is having some effect, although we felt that teachers and researchers in the area of writing are insufficiently involved. We think much could be gained by joining of forces of NCTE and other professional education associations with the libraries and government associations currently involved in the basic reading and writing movement that is working in the public sector.

We decried that increasing trend toward hiring adjunct instructors in English, particularly to teach composition and other entry-level courses. Not only is such a procedure debasing to both teachers and institutions, it flies in the face of Carnegie Commission recommendations that full-time faculty should expend more energy teaching freshman and sophomore level students. Although adjuncts often teach well, too many adjunct composition teachers are not trained as writing teachers, are seldom if ever evaluated, and attach a low value to what they are doing. Morale and salary problems also occur frequently when adjuncts do much of the teaching of writing.

Commission members acclaimed the trend toward more prizes and competitions for writing students. Schools and school districts, colleges, various publishers, and NCTE sponsor prizes that celebrate student writing and highlight achievement among students and teachers.

Discussion over "English as an official language" ensued, with members unsure what such a designation would mean to teachers and students. The California vote struck us as part of the general concern for national identity and proficiency in English. We felt that legislation is almost always a clumsy and inept way to effect change in language, and we worried about the long-term effect of such legislation on teachers and students in English and the foreign languages.

We spent considerable time considering the "integration of the Language Arts" trend, along with the related trends which encourage teachers to consider writing in relation to reading, speaking, listening, and critical thinking. We found the trend toward integration of the Language Arts a positive one, even though classroom implementation will cause some confusion and chaos. Members felt that the "whole language" approach was becoming more prevalent at the elementary levels, and that reading and writing are being brought together more at the college level (and that K-12 reading and writing specialists are talking to each other more--a very positive trend which we hope carries to the college level). We stated that testing encourages fragmentation and thus the isolation of one verbal skill from another, and that such testing is to be avoided whenever possible. Members noted that there was an increasing awareness that talk--and listening--are important aspects of writing, that writing is a social activity even though it is generally done in isolation. We agreed unanimously that writing, reading, speaking, and listening serve one central purpose: communicating.

We expressed some concern about the trend toward critical thinking as an approach to teaching writing. Members argued that critical thinking is not a discrete activity, that it is an essential part of all verbal activities. Critical thinking seminars and approaches seemed to us to be characterized by murky approaches that were more confusing than clarifying. We were cautious about cognitive models, especially because writing involves much more than just cognition.

The Commission was pleased about the trend toward "writing across the curriculum" programs in high schools and beyond. We felt that we should do everything in our power to encourage such a trend. Too often, schools institute a WAC program but do not provide the necessary follow-up support to ensure its continued health and well-being. On the whole, we thought the "write to learn" movement was alive and well in America.

We were pleased to note the continuing trend toward the study of nonfictional prose as a rhetorical and literary genre. On the other hand, we raised some concerns about the state of writing textbooks in high schools and colleges. Many composition courses are textbook driven. Given that situation, it behooves faculty and publishers to produce quality texts that reflect current theory and practice. Unfortunately, most current texts do not. We deplored some of the current practices of text publishing and text selection. We deplored the undue and destructive influence of large state-adoptions on the publishing policies of K-12 publishers. We implored our profession to support only those texts which are theoretically and pedagogically sound.

That discussion led us to the continuing problem of teachers and parents stressing "correct" writing to the detriment of "fluency." We recognized the need for writers to correct errors, but we also

recognized that concern as one that comes late in the writing process. Textbooks and teachers too often emphasize correctness while underplaying risk-taking, play, developmental progression, rhetorical constraints, etc.

Members noted that too many schools and teachers quickly label students "learning disabled." Such hasty designations are counterproductive since they allow teachers to dismiss students as "cognitive failures." We noted that most current theory, research, and practice has not found its way into the "learning disabled" teacher network.

We deplored the large class sizes and the large teaching loads that writing teachers must endure. We felt that probably the single most significant improvement in writing instruction would probably result from a reduction in student load for writing teachers. But we also felt the need for more research in this area to support our contentions, as well as the need for an increased effort to educate teachers, parents, and school boards about writing process and the need for interactional models of teaching.

Finally, we considered the steady trend toward introducing computers in the composition classroom. We held that the computer is not a replacement for a teacher, nor should it be used primarily as an electronic workbook (although we noted that students can often improve their grammar and usage test scores by engaging in computer drill). Computers are encouraging more students to write and more students to revise--very positive trends. We felt that little of the instructional software we had seen is yet adequate to teach writing and that so-called "style-checkers" often actually inhibit revising by focusing exclusive attention on prepositions, passive constructions, etc. We concluded by noting that most schools can find money for capital investment (computers, desks, software programs) but have a much harder time finding money for essential staff support without which computers are largely useless.

Commission on Curriculum
Eileen Lundy, Director

Current trends and issues in English education identified by the Commission on Curriculum fall into three categories. The first in importance and a matter of growing concern among professionals in the field is the control of curriculum by agencies and forces outside the profession. In the second category, teacher education, we find that outside forces may not be producing desirable formation programs for either the preservice or inservice education of teachers. The third category evolved from the commission's assessment of the gap between research and practice in the teaching of writing and literature at all levels of the curriculum.

The threads of the three categories weave to form one pattern, an enormous question mark: who is in control of the profession of English Language Arts education?

In the following report, I will list the items identified by the commission and follow the lists with a summarizing statement.

Curriculum Control

- State legislatures have become increasingly intrusive in determining and evaluating curriculum. Because of the nature of legislative procedures, the results of such intrusion produce political compromises rather than programs designed to bring the best of research and development to the classrooms of our schools, colleges and universities.

- Legislative decisions in education reflect the need of the society to conserve and pass on the knowledge and wisdom of the past. This is a noble effort and one to be supported if balanced with the need to prepare students for the world in which they live now and the one they will inhabit in the near future. The effects of legislation based on a "return to the basics" has upset that balance and we are educating our children for an industrial society, a world in which they do not live and will not live. In spite of research and development to the contrary, basic skills and coverage all seem to dominate discussion in the public forum. An ad hoc committee of the Association Departments of English of the Modern Language Association produced a study showing that the nature of what is taught in our classrooms has not changed much during the past two decades.

- Censorship continues to flourish. The results: books that help form the canon of our literary heritage are disappearing from the shelves of our schools; apprehensive teachers and administrators are deleting those books from the curriculum to avoid problems with censoring groups.

- The need for literacy is less obvious in many American homes. The home has moved into the electronic age faster than the school, at least with television. The disappearance of reading and writing from the everyday environment of students subtly weakens the partnership of home and school in the demonstration of the demands of literacy in our society, leaving school as the primary, and too often the only, place for students to discover their motivation to become literate.

- Textbook adoptions, with the political and idealogical compromises involved in these adoptions, in a few hevily populated states (i.e., Texas, California, New York) continue to influence unduly the content of textbooks used throughout the United States. Also, the "textbook curriculum," a curriculum following the dictates of the goals and lessons of a given textbook, continues to be the curriculum in many places. Reading programs remain particularly vulnerable to the textbook curriculum as basal readers form the reading program in many elementary schools.

- The proliferation of standardized testing at all levels has led to over-simplification, isolation and trivialization of curriculum. Mechanical rather than organic approaches to the teaching of the language arts have resulted, such approaches being in conflict with the best of current research and development. These tests place an unbalanced emphasis on immediate results, removing support from teaching addressed to long range goals. The amonts of money spent on testing leads tax-payers to demand that teachers teach what students need to pass the tests. Instead of the tests following the dictates of the curriculum, the curriculum too often becomes a series of lessons to prepare for the tests. Curriculum planning in those cases, serves the tests rather than the broader and deeper educational needs of the students. The tests thus contribute to the removal of the control of the English Language Arts curriculum from the professionals in the field by placing an important part of the control in the hands of testing agencies and businesses. Such standardized test-driven curricula do not allow for demographic considerations in the design of curricula. That is, the local and regional differences that affect learning, particularly those influencing language development and literacy, cease to be major influences, if they are considered at all, in test-based curricula. "What do I teach" supersedes "whom do I teach" with the delicate balance between the two being thrown off in favor of the concentration on topics, the "what" of the curriculum. Such control of the curriculum by standardized testing removes too much of curricular decision making from the professionals in the field: the teachers, instructors, professors, supervisors and administrators of programs in English Language Arts. A tendency has developed in some state testing toward adopting narrow, mechanistic ways to deal with problems of literacy, quick

answers to problems that have become political bandwagons. Rather than being a means to reveal what teachers need to know to plan instruction more conducive to student's learning testing has become an end in itself. The kinds of testing being used, in an effort to test minimal standards, set the goals of curriculum at minimal levels and even, wittingly or unwittingly, dictate reductive reviews of knowledge. Thus, they build a fence around the curriculum, closing out the creative, innovative teachers and curriculum builders.

- The trend toward co-curricular "pull-out" programs for students with special needs has grown to the point of being detrimental to the major curriculum. Such programs not only interrupt and even reduce instructional time with students who need it most, but they also reduce or destroy the flexibility needed to weave an integrated program in the language arts for those students. Also, we found little or no consideration given to the needs of exceptional students other than the gifted and talented in the curriculum guides submitted to NCTE or in the national or state convention programs. Yet these students are often mainstreamed into our regular classrooms in the public schools. We are in a "Catch-22" situation here: the "pull-out" programs are a problem, yet we are not preparing ourselves to understand and serve the needs of the special students when they are in our classes.

- We identified a number of positive trends: the very discussion of the curriculum in the public forum is a sign of public interest; studies such as the recent Holmes and Carnegie Reports offer substantial challenge to unproductive trends in education and teacher education; studies of and resulting changes in the general education core in the first two years of college provide support for needed changes at that level; evidence of more international sharing of educational concerns, research and development is surfacing.

- One trend receiving mixed reviews is the movement to teach critical thinking. The Air Force Academy offers one of the better programs in this area, a course in "Science, Speaking and Thinking." In this program, critical thinking is taught as it applies to and within scientific exploration and experimentation. Mortimer Adler once remarked that we cannot teach critical thinking skills; we must be thinking about something. The problem in some of the current work in critical thinking skills is the lack of context and the resulting reductionistic view that critical thinking skills can be identified in isolated form. In the field of English Language Arts, however, the renewed interest in integrated instruction in reading and writing, literature and writing has already begun to provide effective development of critical thinking. What we must avoid is a mechanization of the approach to the teaching of critical thinking.

The Education of English Language Arts Teachers

- The content and processes by which students are educated in preparation for teaching have come under scrutiny by special groups (see Holmes and Carnegie Commission Reports), by legislators, and by educators themselves. NCTE has developed an excellent set of guidelines for the preparation of teachers of English Language Arts. School-college collaborative programs continue to offer inservice professional advancement programs such as the National Writing Projects, seminars sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the summer seminars sponsored by the Association for Departments of English, the seminars and institutes sponsored throughout the year by sections of NCTE, etc. Also, articles in books and professional journals increasingly support and describe productive programs involving collaboration between schools and colleges (see Ron Forune's recent anthology, School-College Collaborative Programs in English).

- The preservice preparation of elementary teachers of language continues to raise questions. Minimally educated in any single discipline of knowledge, the elementary education major in some states receives the equivalent of the first two years of general education with the remainder of their college programs being governed by certification requirements. In some cases those requirements allow concentration in a discipline. In many others, the junior and senior years of college are spent exclusively in courses in teaching thus sending the graduating elementary major off with little depth in any particular subject. Elementary majors who opt for the latter program do not gain through their college studies the opportunity to develop a mode of thinking represented by a particular discipline. That they will not need to teach that depth of knowledge is beside the point. They themselves should be well educated. This raises the question that must be faced again and again in succeeding eras, each era partially defining itself by the answers it gives: what is an educated person?

- One inservice strategy currently proving to be counterproductive is the manner in which testing and evaluating teachers is being conducted in some areas. A skill-mastery philosophy appears to underlie some of the observation techniques used to evaluate teachers, producing ill effects in teachers similar to the ill effects skill-mastery programs have produced in students. Certain skills or strategies identified as those constituting "good teaching" or a "good lesson" must be checked off on a list by an observer in the classroom. The checklist and resulting evaluations give the appearance of objectivity but actually rest on the subjective judgment of the observer. Teachers report high levels of anxiety over the evaluations because of the secrecy surrounding the training of the observers in the use of the instrument, because the individual class is judged out of the context of the ongoing curriculum,

because the resulting evaluations do not seem to concur with patterns of evaluations from previous years nor sometimes with the consensus of opinion among colleagues in a school as to who the good teachers are, and because teachers feel pressured to follow the evaluational scheme when observed even if it is less effective than a curricular plan they have devised. One result of this kind of evaluation is the reduction of risk-taking by classroom teachers, the kind of risk-taking that enables the teacher to innovate, to develop new and creative approaches to provide the practical links to the findings of theory and research. In the testing of teachers as in the testing of students, the programs place the concern for assessment over the concern for assistance to the instructional program. They become ends in themselves. Designed to identify teachers who are not teaching well, these tests are hampering the productivity and the morale of the most creative and productive teachers.

- The wedding of theory and practice continues to be a need in both the preservice and inservice education of teachers. Teachers at all levels need to know the current thinking in the profession. Theory and research do not always precede effective practice, but often they do. When they do, practicing members of the profession should be those best equipped to see all the implications of the practical development of researched theories. Yet somewhere in the education of teachers and in the press of our daily schedules, we come to an adversarial pitting of theory against practice. We must examine the sources of this divisive influence within the profession and work to heal it. Some of the best work in this healing process is being done in the school-college collaborative programs already mentioned.

- The topic of the teaching of writing receives more attention in college curricula and in inservice programs than does that of the teaching of literature. As a result, teachers of writing have more readily available resources of wedding current theory and practice than do teachers of literature.

Teaching Writing and Literature

- The new rhetoric has had an impact on college curricula. 25% of the total number of jobs available in English at the college level in 1985 were in writing.

- The influence of research and development in the teaching of writing is also showing in classrooms at the public school level, but a new orthodoxy appears to be on the rise. This orthodoxy is an old tendency to use and demand formulas for teaching applied to the writing process. The result is a linear step-by-step view of the writing process in some curriculum guides and published textbooks and an unnecessary process/product dichotomy underlying

those works as well as some articles in professional journals.

- Rexford Brown of the Education Commission of the States has said that more writing is going on in our schools. Member of the Commission on Curriculum agreed that more writing is going on in some schools and colleges. They wondered if there is sometimes more talk about writing than actual writing going on, citing the recent results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress to support the question.

- More substantive selections in literature are finding their way into the curricula of secondary schools and introductory courses in college. Also, a new hunger for literature among our college students is appearing. Literature is being restored to writing courses at the college level, as the day for writing courses without reading appears to be almost over. At the same time, the dialogue between professors of writing and professors of literature is opening as the two areas converge in research and in effective teaching strategies.

- The interest in literature and performance seems to be growing. The Folger Library's summer institutes for secondary teachers have brought Shakespeare off the pages of books and back onto the stage. The dramatic element in poetry and fiction is proving an effective place to wed the language arts of speaking and literary reading, to the advantage of both.

- Literary texts at all levels continue to be narrow in critical orientation. They lack gender and ethnic balance as well as the balance of critical approaches. Much of the material accompanying literary selections in the texts for secondary schools and colleges is still formalistic in nature. Reader response criticism does not yet influence writers of textbooks in literature for our schools.

Summary: Among the educational reform strategies nationwide, testing has run off with the bandwagon, dragging curriculum behind it. With the formulation of tests ultimately in the hands of testing corporations informed by legislation, English Language Arts educators are rapidly losing control of the design of English Language Arts curriculum K-12. We stand challenged to assert ourselves professionally, to regain control by supporting the involvement of leaders in our profession in the very political process that has produced this situation. (1) We must learn how best to assess and evaluate learning in English Language Arts and how to communicate that knowledge credibly to the public. (2) Members of the profession of English Education must lead in the examination of the preparation of teachers of English Language Arts, NCTE's guidelines being a good first step. (3) Teachers of English Language Arts at all levels must be open to the advances

of research, working to bring the best of current theory and research to practice. (4) We need lobbyists at state and federal levels who can communicate clearly the best thinking in the profession to well-intentioned but often poorly informed voters and legislators. We strongly urge NCTE to supply that leadership in Washington, D.C. We urge the state affiliates to supply similar leadership at state levels.

Teachers must begin to move from the reactor's to the creator's stance in curriculum building. The question before us is how do we do this? What do teachers need to know to build their own curriculum in the pursuit of broad goals? What should the curriculum of teacher education programs, both preservice and inservice, provide to better prepare teachers to stay abreast of the learning in the profession? What will convince school boards, legislators and the public that teachers do know what they need to know to be trusted with curriculum planning? Where is this being done? Rather than identifying only exemplary curriculum guides, we need to find the exemplary curriculum processes, those curricula that allow the professional English educators to practice their profession fully, those curricula using evaluations of learning that inform instruction and lead to challenge and creativity in teaching and learning.

The issue of curricular controls presents challenges to English Language Arts educators and reflects not only a growing frustration with the trends we have identified but also an emerging vision as to what we must do about the issue. This vision, while still somewhat cloudy, is clearer than it was last year. We must inform ourselves, challenge and support one another, speak clearly and forcefully to the public, and become involved politically.

Commision on the English Language
James C. Stalker, Director

To begin this summary on a positive note, the Commission is pleased to see new resources available for language research in teaching, in particular, publication of the Dictionary of American Regional English which received this year's NCTE Russell Award. The PBS-TV series "The Story of English," is a good series which presents a well-balanced discussion of English, is also available.

The Commission wants to highlight its concern with the English-only movement, a movement which we feel serious enough to warrant the continued attention of the Executive Committee. Our Commission-sponsored session for Los Angeles will focus on this issue.

The areas of continuing concern, which we have talked about over the last several years, are distressing. The simple fact that they continue to be concerns, that they are not replaced by new concerns, means that they not only continue, but grow worse as they grow entrenched. None is more worthy of detailing than the others; all are worthy of attention. In general, they share a common core--lack of knowledge about language leads to inept (even harmful) teaching methods, misguided assumptions, often well meaning but harmful tests, texts, and curriculum. We recognize that some concerns, for example the long standing public misunderstanding of language variation in all its forms, require persistent continued education of both teachers and students in the hope that the students will become an educated public. Others seem to be more amenable to change or even prevention. For example, here in the early morning of the computer age there is no particular reason to allow English teachers to move their grammar drill sheets from paper to computer monitor.

Although distressed, we remain optimistic that NCTE, as an organization, can have some effect in altering these trends.

Many states now require some form of competency testing in "language proficiency" for teachers and students. In addition many states assess teaching behavior in general. While the renewed interest in the quality of the performance of teachers and students is commendable, the pervasive influence of this type of testing on teachers and on students should be carefully examined in two ways.

1) Although formal tests of "language proficiency" increasingly are being utilized as a major (or sometimes sole) basis for the placement, retention, promotion and evaluation of teachers and students, what the tests measure must be questioned. Research shows that language use varies considerably from situation to situation, depending on such factors as perceived audience, topic, and the medium of communication (e.g., spoken or written language). No

formalized test can take all these factors into account. Since student and teacher performance on standardized tests of "language proficiency" is only distantly related to their abilities to perform in actual situations, such tests should be avoided.

2) With regard to the effects of this testing on classroom practice, teachers are faced with one or two choices. Either they can ignore the competency testing, or they can respond to the demand to improve the performance of the student. Ignoring the competency testing may put both the teacher and the student at peril. If students do not pass the test, they face undue remediation, or they may not be promoted or allowed to graduate. Teachers of such students face analogous consequences--not being certified, reappointed or promoted, or not receiving a raise in salary. These same fates may occur as a consequence of teachers failing the teacher competency test.

The other alternative is for teachers to reduce instruction in language to a collection of gimmicks or tricks for passing tests. Instruction in language too easily becomes the completion of "usage worksheets" or "punctuation practice." Respect for diversity, creativity and complexity in language is usually lost in a cry for minimal competency.

It is incumbent upon the profession to define and support quality in communication in such a way as to maintain respect while fostering careful exploration in both the art and science of language study and teaching.

The current movement to make English the official language of the nation and of individual states has brought renewed attention to the issue of bilingualism and bilingual education. Some of the materials and ideas being disseminated by this English-only movement mislead the public about language variation in America and engender negative attitudes toward speakers of other languages and dialects.

Popular attitudes that are of concern relate primarily to two beliefs: first, that the United States is an English-only-speaking country; and, second, that bilingual education is a luxury. The first belief is reflected in the media and press, specifically in editorial spots or letters, in which individuals state that all immigrants should learn English as quickly as possible. The "rationale" is that what was good enough for earlier generations is good enough for current immigrants and that not speaking English is un-American, a rationale which is based on misinformation about who speaks and who does not speak English. In fact, most non-English speakers in the U.S. are native-born Americans rather than fresh immigrants. The second belief, that bilingual education is a luxury is related to the first; but it becomes prevalent in tight economic times. The argument is that we can hardly afford to educate students in English, much less a second language. Believers do not distinguish between types of bilingual programs (e.g., those that provide a transition into English vs. those that maintain two languages beyond a transitional phase), and so seem to need

information about the psychological and educational costs of not providing minimally a transition from a second language into English.

A related concern has to do with language education practices for students who do not know English. Pedagogically, this is a huge problem. What we highlight here is the reliance on textbooks and, therefore, teachers on out-dated methods, characterized by repetition and drill. The faculty rationale support the use of highly structured, bit-by-bit (easy to learn) lessons for children who are still viewed as linguistically deficient. Being "bilingual" (often a synonym for monolingual in a language other than English) is a stigma that may be heightened by required participation in special classes for LEP's (Limited English Proficiency students). There are no facile and effective methods for teaching a second language, particularly at the elementary level, but we recognize the need to try alternative approaches that more closely simulate real-life communication.

Another concern is more of a hunch than a documented fact. There seems to be in research on bilingualism and bilingual education a desire to segregate bilingual research from other kinds of language research. In some cases this seems justified since many research questions related to bilingualism differ from those of first language researchers. In other cases, there is (as in other disciplines or areas) a tendency to re-invent the wheel, at least the methodological wheel. Thus, methods developed by first language researchers are often either undiscovered or ignored by second language or bilingual researchers. The establishment of a common data exchange system, being explored by the National Center for Bilingual Research, would be a step toward sharing methodology and results. Such a data exchange system would provide access to data sets of any contributor, regardless of whether her/his interest was first or second language acquisition or education.

Commission on Media
David England, Director

One large, general category of continuing issues in media was clarified in the Commissions' San Antonio discussions: concern for protection of teachers who use media was variously expressed. In this general area, both copyright and censorship issues were discussed. Copyright legislation has not been sufficiently clarified or made available to teachers. Consequently, would-be users of certain media are fearful or disinclined. The threat of censorship had long ago broadened to include film and television in the classroom. Recently, however, the dark veil of censorship increasingly threatens anything considered non-traditional--including, of course, any uses of electronic media. And finally, the threat of insensitive teacher evaluation instruments which fail to acknowledge teachers' constructive uses of media mitigate against media use. The standard, single-item "...uses media creatively" box to be checked scarcely does justice to what should be (or is) teachers' integration of media into the curriculum. Consequently, teachers' protection from confusing legislation, from censorship, and from narrowly conceived evaluation formed a focus for discussion of continuing issues.

Of continuing concern, too, were such perennial issues as the need for general English curriculum reform in an age of mass media and the problems arising from not only teaching the basics, but from testing only the basics. Likewise, evidences that computers in English were too often only used for word processing were noted, as was the continuing need for the general media education of teachers, administrators, and supervisors.

Given the emerging patterns of teacher supervision, the need for media literate and media sensitive administrators was identified. Dissemination of both research and resources to justify and facilitate media education was cited as a new, emerging concern. It was suggested that, by now, there is a body of research and pool of resources not available twenty years ago--the issue is, neither the research studies nor the resources are being properly disseminated and made available. The cathode ray tube is becoming a point of confluence for publishing, entertainment, and data processing in our culture--an emerging issue is the degree to which users will no longer make traditional distinctions.

More particular and specific issues such as film colorization, the potential of desk top publishing, the threat of word processors when perceived as panaceas for writing instruction, and the need for surveys of teachers' use of newest media technology were cited as among emerging trends, issues, and needs of media education.

Commission on Reading
Dorothy J. Watson, Director

The stronghold that basal readers have on the instruction of reading in the United States is possibly a strangle-hold that keeps children away from literature, and keeps teachers away from materials, methods and techniques that would more naturally and productively contribute to the teaching and learning of reading. The Commission on Reading is concerned with the content, use and economics of the contemporary basal reader and is asking questions such as: Where did the basal come from and how did it achieve such a central role in American education? What is the nature (theory, content, intent, scope) of the basal reader? Who are the authors, editors and publishers of basals, and who and what influences them? What are the teachers' and learners' roles in selecting and using the basals? These and other questions will be addressed at an invitational symposium sponsored by the Commission and funded by the NCTE Research Foundation at the Los Angeles convention.

Related to the issue of state or district mandates, such as the required use of basal reading programs, is the issue of teacher empowerment. Because of 1. mandates in which curricular decisions are taken out of their hands, 2. trivialized teacher assessment that ignores good teaching, 3. isolation of knowledgeable teachers and lack of opportunities to gain support from colleagues, 4. transmission-of-information model in teacher education institutions and 5. industrial management models applied to their classrooms that narrow curriculum to that which is measurable, the power drain from teachers is becoming more intense and intolerable.

The so-called effective schools movement has made a negative impact not only on teachers (in terms of curricular diversity), but on homes (in terms of cultural diversity). Literacy failure in such movements and in educational reports is often falsely attributed to teachers and families. Standardized tests too often reflect this narrow view of literacy. The effect is that cultural and family diversity call attention in a negative way--as differences to eradicate, conforming to a model of homogeneity in the school and in the home. Minority issues such as equal educational opportunity seem again to be 'invisible'.

These concerns lead to a related one--censorship that involves removing books from libraries all the way to governmental withholding of information through selective dissemination of what it considers sound knowledge. There is a continued need to challenge documents, such as What Works, that oversimplify complex issues and distort or ignore the knowledge base of the field.

A final major concern relates to many of the issues above in that it deals with alternatives to mandated reading programs, teacher empowerment, cultural diversity, freedom of information and the use of professional knowledge in the literacy curriculum--programs that are child-centered, meaning-focused and literature-based. Such

programs are often called whole language programs. Teachers who are investigating the knowledge base of such programs are often going through a transition period in which their theories and beliefs about language and language teaching are challenged (by themselves and by others). During such a time teachers need to consider how they are changing and they need to support each other in their professional growth.

Commission on Literature
Gladys Veidemanis, Director

Sources of Encouragement

Though realistic about the continuing threat of censorship, inhibiting state mandates, budget restraints, and the increasingly conservative climate of English teaching in American schools and colleges, the Commission on Literature perceives a number of trends encouraging to teachers of literature. A marked revival of interest in the teaching of literature is apparent in such organizations as NCTE and among curriculum planners, K-through college, as evidenced in professional publications and conference programs, efforts of colleges and state departments of instruction to establish a "core curriculum" in literature, and increased attention to integrating the curriculum, for example through strengthening the link between literature study and composition. A number of elementary schools have abandoned exclusive use of the basal reader in favor of texts devoted to children's literature. Storytelling appears to be experiencing a revival, as witnessed by the availability of such services as "Dial-a-Story" in Los Gatos, CA, and "Dial-a-poem" in Chicago. The absence of literature and the other humanities in the required undergraduate program is being scrutinized in America's colleges as they seek to define what should constitute the humanistic component of a student's undergraduate education. Increased cooperation between public and university libraries and the proliferation of volunteer-run libraries attest to heightened efforts to make books and library services more readily available to the reading public.

The Threat of Censorship, State Mandates, and Budget Restraints

Regrettably, the problem of censorship is worsening, along with restrictions resulting from budget and staff cutbacks. Whereas there appears to be less censorship today by persons involved in education than was the case twenty years ago, censorship by agencies outside the school has become better organized and more sophisticated. Attacks on the alleged promulgation of "secular humanism" in today's textbooks, such as have occurred in Alabama, are especially disheartening. While, as a profession we are better prepared than in the past to deal with censors, the spillover effect is inevitably intimidation of classroom teachers, curriculum planners, and textbook companies, leading to entrenchment of traditional and conservative practices.

Imposition of mandates by state legislatures and state departments of education is also increasingly depriving school districts of individual autonomy. Especially troublesome are superimposed teacher evaluation procedures (e.g., "the Super Seven" in New Mexico and the 27-criteria list in Texas), which inflict unreasonable and unrealizable expectations on classroom teachers. Too often such mandates have the effect of stifling teacher creativity, classroom spontaneity, and faculty morale.

Budget cutbacks, too, are taking their toll on class size, book selection, and instructional practices. Both at the high school and college level, teachers are facing ever-larger literature classes, limiting the possibility of personalized classroom interaction. And with the ever-rising cost of paperbacks, students in many public schools are again being limited to a single anthology. In addition, as educational institutions purchase fewer trade books, many important literary works--particularly those by minority writers--are becoming unavailable and consequently unrepresented in the school or college curriculum.

Troublesome Professional Developments

Of particular concern to Commission members is the increasing disparity between classroom practice in the teaching of literature and current critical theory. What is needed, clearly, is more contact and familiarity with the work of colleagues, such as David Bleich, Norman Holland, Wolfgang Iser, Robert Probst, Louise Rosenblatt, and Robert Scholes, individuals on "the cutting edge" of the profession. Such contact can occur, of course, only through greater availability of refresher courses in the teaching of literature and increased dialogue through professional journals, workshops, and convention meetings. Also of continuing concern, both at the college and secondary level, is the displacement of literature because of emphasis on writing and testing. The increasing trend of separation of teachers of writing from teachers of literature in colleges and universities, also in professional organizations, is obviously counter-productive to efforts to integrate the curriculum as well as the profession as a whole.

Looking ahead, the Commission on Literature foresees immense changes as a consequence of the Electronics Revolution: the transformation of the traditional bookstore into Media Centers; the proliferation of video outlets; the further disappearance of small publishers and consolidation of video/bookstore complexes; the teaching of literature by computer. We remain confident, however, that books will continue to play a vital role in this changing future

Standing Committee Against Censorship
John M. Kean, Chair

The Standing Committee Against Censorship (John M. Kean, Chair) has a growing list of concerns: (1) the increase in censorship attempts at all levels of schooling, (2) the expansion of censorship attempts to include not only what is being taught but how it is being taught, (3) the lack of public trust and understanding of teachers and librarians who are selecting and using materials, (4) publishers' failure to protect the integrity of authors' work, (5) the chilling devisive "copy cat" potential of court decisions trying to balance the public good with individual rights particularly in the area of religion, (6) the lack of evidence to portray the full impact of censorship of books and other media, (7) our failure in convincing rank and file teachers and librarians of the seriousness of this threat to our constitution, our schools, and our society, (8) the need to insure that all teachers, librarians, administrators, school boards and higher education faculty are educated in their responsibilities in areas related to intellectual freedom.

Censorship attempts have been increasing at all levels of schooling. An elementary reading program, for example, was attacked because "a child might adopt the views of a feminist, a humanist, a pacifist, an anti-Christian, a vegetarian or an advocate of a 'one world' government." Teachers in some school districts are being directed not to have students keep journals or write personal stories, while other teachers have dropped journals anticipating they too will be told to stop using them. Some school administrators are rationalizing their own control of what librarians (presumably teachers) select because "they [librarians] were indoctrinated with patriotic zeal into an ultra liberal selection philosophy promoted across the country by intellectual freedom committees which do not take a moderate middle of the road approach." Some schools prohibit teachers from using spontaneously any material that has not had prior approval from someone else.

On the plus side, organizations that have traditionally protected academic freedom have joined with recently formed groups to more carefully track censorship to analyze these efforts and to report to the public and the profession, to file amicus curae briefs in appropriate court cases, and to assist local professionals and citizen groups who are trying to protect intellectual freedom in the schools, libraries, and the public marketplace as well. The issues and questions seem to be more complex and not as straightforward as they were several years ago. How do we protect the individual's rights and the public good? Should we treat the visual media differently from the print media? These questions will probably prove troublesome for some time to come. Have we censored religion, particularly Christianity, by avoiding it in the public schools? Have the courts moved too far into curriculum decision making?